
BIRTH, INFANCY, MARRIAGE, AND DEATH IN BULGARIA.

FROM the cradle to the grave, the Bulgarian is haunted by strange customs and observances, such as are little known in Europe. When a child is born, the witch, who is present officially, brings a reaping-hook into the room, and then proceeds to rub the infant all over with salt, and to fumigate the room in order to drive away all intrusive evil spirits from the mother and child.

With the exception of this bath of salt, a Bulgarian child is never washed until he attains the age of seven years; and, for the first years of his life, a piece of garlic (in the case of a girl, one or two coins) is tied upon his head to preserve him from the evil eye. As soon as he is able to work, he is surrounded by superstitions which he is obliged to observe: if he fetches water, he must throw away some of it; if he brings flour from the mill, he must burn incense under it; in short, he cannot take a step without coming in contact with a superstition or an *adet* (custom), which, if not respected, will avenge itself on him, and, without counting the spirits who lie in wait for him in the forest or at the fountain, his life is filled with fears which go far to compensate for its great enjoyments of eating, drinking, and dancing.

When a young man wishes to marry, he speaks to his parents, who arrange the matter with those of the lady chosen, and *swaty** are sent to propose in due form; the amount of the corbeille is settled, as well as that of the *basek parasi*, or head-money, presented by the suitor to the mother of his intended, and then the *gody*, or betrothal, takes place. This is a ceremony of great interest to all Bulgarians, who have the same tastes as those commemorated in the songs about their great heroes, of which the constant chorus is—

"Pak Jede i pije,"
"And he eats and drinks."

The *gody* is usually held at the house of the girl's parents, where the elder guests sit around a cloth spread on the floor and covered with various dishes all strongly flavored with garlic, while the wine-jug circulates freely; in another room the young people indulge in a similar repast, and afterward dance outside the house, the girls singing songs at intervals. The young man then brings in his presents, which consist of various articles of feminine clothing, several pairs of slippers, bracelets, ear-rings, a head-dress and necklace of gold or silver coins, and a silver girdle; the value of these offerings is discussed by the father of the girl, and a fresh bargain ensues, the suitor adding coin by coin to the necklace till his future father-in-law is satisfied, and, when this result is attained, all the finery is placed in a *tekneh*, a wooden dish used for making bread and for a cradle. Then all the guests set to work again at the banquet till daylight dawns upon the many tipsy and the very few sober. The next day the young lady puts on all the presents of her *fiancé*, and is considered as engaged.

This betrothal is in no ways a religious ceremony, and leaves it open to either party to break off the engagement, but such a rupture seldom occurs; the marriage never takes place within six months of the *gody*, and is often delayed for two or even three years.

With some rare exceptions, these arrangements are by no means love-matches; the young man wishes to establish himself as head of a household, and chooses a wife as he would a yoke of buffaloes, looking upon her as a machine for labor and the probable mother of sons who will in time be able to work for him, and whom he can beat as his father beat him until he became too strong to permit it—for a Bulgarian son, when he grows up, makes no scruple of returning with interest the blows received from his father. Thus the bride is chosen, not for the beauty of her more or less Kalmuck features, but for the muscular strength which will render her valuable as a beast of burden.

Sometimes you may meet with a Bulgarian Lindoro who translates his passion into the music of the Gaida, or courts some stalwart Rosina by playfully throwing lumps of mud at her as they meet at the fountain, or who buys an enormous pair of boots and spurs to attract the attention of his beloved, and proves the strength of his affection by treading upon her toes.

But Lindoro here, like the true Lindoro everywhere, is poor, and perhaps seeks, by a disinterested love, to attract into his own purse a few of the zecchini which he needs; at any rate, it is no blasphemy to doubt the purity of his motives in a country where a powerfully-built wife is a good investment, instead of being an expensive luxury.

The marriage (*swadba*) is prepared for by the bridegroom's installation in his new house, and the purchase of various domestic animals, especially a pair of oxen or buffaloes, without the possession of which the match would be considered a very poor one for the lady, if not entirely out of the question; when all is ready, he sends his parents or

his *swaty* to announce that he wishes the ceremony to take place in two or three weeks.

During the week preceding the marriage, which is always celebrated on a Sunday, the parents of the bride and bridegroom prepare the furniture, etc., of the new *ménage*, the girls of the village dance before the house of the bride, and the youths pay the same compliment to the bridegroom. On the Friday before the marriage, the presents, hung on a cord, are exhibited in the bride's house, and she herself has her hair plaited into innumerable minute tresses; then she takes, *for the first and last time in her life*, a complete bath. Horrible as this statement seems, it is the literal truth. Till the age of seven years a child must not be touched by water, and, although, after that period, the face, hands, and feet may be washed, the cleansing of the whole body would be *chok gunah*, a great sin, and is never practised by either male or female Bulgarians, with the solitary exception mentioned.

On the eventful Sunday, when the *papas* are ready, the ceremony takes place in the church, if there be one, or otherwise in the bridegroom's house, and, after the marriage, the happy couple are led in procession to the mansion of the bride's father, where the young girls dance, corn is sprinkled over the husband and wife, and the latter, her face covered with a veil (often scarlet), kisses the hands of all the married women of the village, receiving in return a fig from each of them.

Then all the usual feasting goes on, and all the guests drink more than is good for them, and the married couple are shut up in their own house for a week, during which time they may neither go out nor receive visits.

When this period of imprisonment is over, the married women fetch the bride, who carries two water-buckets, to the fountain, round which she walks three times, preceded by the oldest of the women, then the contents of the buckets are thrown over her, she kisses hands all round, and again receives a present of figs.

The same day she pays a visit to her mother, and is henceforward considered as a member of the sisterhood of married women.

The married women are not generally allowed to join in the village dance, although some of the bolder spirits amongst them occasionally do so; this dance, which is called in Russian *búchok*, is here styled *horó* (Χόρος), and strongly resembles the "Romaika's dull round." A circle of dancers is formed, the girls and men holding each other by the belt or girdle, and going round and round for hours to the music of the *gaida*. The motion is slow, monotonous, and ungraceful, but the coup d'œil from a distance is picturesque enough, from the gaudy colors of the female dresses. In our village the feminine taste for ornament has invented a new head-dress, consisting of pieces of the English or French newspapers received by us, which are in great request by the village beauties as *bonjoux*, or jewels; the portions most sought after are the headings or the advertisements in big capitals, so that the Derekuoi young ladies may often be seen wearing on their foreheads such placards as the following: "The Times," "Mort aux Rats," "Pall Mall Gazette," "Vente à cause de Faillite," "Holloway's Pills," "Plus d'huile de foie de Morue," "A vendre à grand rabais," "Mme. Elise, Marchand de Modes," and a host of other typographical varieties, which are highly prized in the first circles of the Derekuoi fashionables.

At the end of every life, whether one of hardship and labor like the Turks, or feasting and idling like the Bulgarians, comes death; but just as the latter considers baptism *not* as the admission of the infant into the Church of Christ, but as a mere sprinkling with water for which the *papas* receives so much, so he looks upon death as the discharge of a mere animal function.

When he is given over by the witch, he prepares for the passage from life to an unknown world with a *sang froid* strongly resembling courage, but which is merely the result of a fatalism arising from apathy; he bargains with the *papas* as to the price of his burial, orders the mortuary feasts, and, in short, prepares himself very quietly to repose in the grave which is already dug for him. During all this time the room is filled with women, shrieking and groaning in a manner sufficient almost to kill a healthy man.

At the moment of death, all pots, kettles, and other utensils are turned upside-down, in order to prevent the soul of the departed taking refuge in one of them, and therefrom commencing a system of annoyance against the family; candles or tapers are lit around the body, and the head is dressed with flowers; a great *eikon* (picture of a saint) is placed upon the breast, the body is clothed in its best clothes,

* For this word there is no exact equivalent in English; the *swaty* are friends of the young man who act as his proxies in the delicate matter of "proposing"—to the parents of the lady, however, never to herself; the latter ceremony, which is so much thought of in England, not being customary in Bulgaria.

or in some specially made for the purpose, and a pair of slippers, while all the members of the family run outside and scream a lamentation, which is generally after this fashion :

“ Oh ! Tanaz ! Boze ! Bozé !

Who will cut wood for us now ?

(Shrieks and howls.)

“ Who will kill the sheep,

Or who will take care of the poor buffaloes ?

(Shrieks and howls.)

“ Who will carry the corn to the mill ?

Who will beat us as you used to do,

Oh, Tanaz ? ”

(Shrieks and howls.)

Five minutes afterward an *araba*, with a couple of oxen or buffaloes, is brought round, containing a ladder, on which the corpse is placed without either shroud or coffin ; but only two men accompany it, one to drive, the other to act as sexton ; arrived at the cemetery, the body is thrown into the grave, a few spadefuls of earth thrown upon it, perhaps a stone is placed, and all is over. No burial-service is ever said, for although a minimum sum of forty piastres must be paid to the papas for every burial, he never appears, nor in any way officiates ; if the family choose to have masses said for the soul of the dead, they must make a new bargain, but in the country it is not much the fashion.

The same evening there is a great death-feast of relations and friends in the house of mourning, which is repeated in ten days, and again at the expiration of one month, three months, six months, a year, and three years ; these are called in Bulgarian *pominki*, commemorations. If the dead man leaves a widow, she goes to his grave every morning for forty days, and throws water over it, “ so that he may not die of thirst.” Besides the *pominki*, the Bulgarians hold a feast in the cemetery on Palm Sunday, and, after much eating and drinking, leave the remains upon the graves of their friends, who, they are persuaded, will eat them during the night ; on Easter Monday an Easter-egg is placed on each grave.

The Bulgarian mourning, which is worn only by women, consists in wearing every article of clothing inside out ; as with us, it varies in duration according to the consanguinity of the relation lost ; that of a widow is fixed at one year.